

Writing Strategy #7 -- 5-Paragraph Essay Format

"Raising the Drinking Age" by Simms High School Student—11th grade—1986

Congress recently passed a bill saying all of the states must raise the drinking age to twenty-one by October 1, 1986 (the beginning of the fiscal year) or lose 5% of their highway funding. If the states don't comply by October 1, 1987, they will lose 10% of their federal highway funding. As of now, twenty-three states have banned the sale of liquor to people under the age of twenty-one. Twenty seven have yet to change. If Montana refuses to change, the 1987 loss will reach almost 11.2 million dollars. The Federal Government shouldn't blackmail the states into raising the drinking age.

There are people who feel that the problem is clearly terrible, and we should do what it takes to help solve the problem, even if it involves the Federal Government. President Reagan had this to say about Washington's action: "Some may feel that my decision is at odds with my philosophical viewpoint that the state problems should involve state solutions . . . in a case like this where the problem is so clear cut, then I have no misgivings about a judicious use of federal inducements to encourage the state to get moving." However, government intervention doesn't always protect society as it is intended to. Take Prohibition for example. Prohibition was meant to protect people from the evils of alcohol by not letting them use it, but people didn't stop using it; they just did it illegally. This is an example of how government intervention failed. Here are some thoughts on the effect of raising the drinking age. Bob Anastas, founder of SADD (Students Against Drunk Driving.) "I just know that no matter what you do, you're still going to have kids drinking and driving." Some Helena high schoolers said that raising the drinking age will only increase the number of illegal young drinkers. They said there are many underage drinkers now, and none of them will change their ways if the age of legal drinking rises. These statements demonstrate how the federal Government's blackmailing the states into raising the drinking age may not serve its purpose.

Blackmail is backing the states into a corner. From *U.S. News and World Report*, July 2, 1984, "There is little doubt that the threat of losing highway money amounting in millions of dollars, would press most noncomplying legislatures into action." Idaho State Representative Linden Bateman, "If the federal legislation passes, the law will also pass in Idaho." The government is leaving the states with no choice. They will be virtually unable to operate without the highway funds they

now receive. Henry David Thoreau once said, "There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power from which all its own power and authority are derived and treats him accordingly."

Not only is the Federal Government blackmailing the states unfairly, it is using limited information. *U.S. News and World Report*, July 4, 1984 said that the RATE of reduced fatalities resulting from a higher drinking age varies greatly from state to state. The results of the Insurance Institute study range from a 75% decrease in one state to 0% in Montana. Albert Coke said, "It would be nearly impossible to draw hard line conclusions, either pro or con, on the basis of these studies or other written on the subject. Too little definitive data is currently available to support either side of the issue at this time, although public sentiment currently supports a change to the twenty-one year old drinking age." The information used has been selected for the benefit of passing the bill rather than getting the whole picture. Here is an example of how one person was swayed. Virginia Representative Stan Parris initially said anyone who is old enough to fight a war is old enough to drink - then he saw the death toll statistics. Limited information is not a basis for blackmail.

The Federal Government shouldn't blackmail the states into raising the drinking age. Our country believes in popular sovereignty or power to the people. Our founding fathers had that in mind when they set up our government. The government's actions are an example of the twisting of their power. Just imagine what our founding fathers would do if they could see us now.

Reading Strategy #3

- What's the author's purpose in writing this? (to inform, persuade, entertain)
- What's the subject? What's the author's opinion about the subject?
- How do you know that's the author's opinion? (Evidence)
- Where is the thesis statement?